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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000416

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SUBJECT: THE IRISH REFERENDUM: A LISBON LANDSLIDE

REF: A. DUBLIN 412
[1](#)B. 10/01/2009 CARNIE E-MAIL
[1](#)C. DUBLIN 397
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Classified By: DCM Robert J. Faucher. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a resounding victory for the "yes" side, the results of the October 2 referendum on the Lisbon Treaty came in at 67.1 percent for "yes" and 32.9 percent for "no." The high turnout (59 percent) and result lends greater credibility both to the embattled Irish government, which must face several difficult issues in the coming months, and the EU, which now moves a major step closer to the entry in force of the treaty meant to give it a greater voice on the world stage. But in the short term for Irish voters and perhaps even in the long term for Europe, this vote might well have fewer consequences than generally assumed. END SUMMARY.

IN EVERY WAY, THE "YES" SIDE HAS IT

[1](#)2. (SBU) The vote was an unmitigated victory for the pro-Lisbon side. It was much more decisive than the first Lisbon referendum in June 2008, in which the result was 53.4 percent against Lisbon and 46.6 percent in favor of the treaty. The turnout was also higher this time, at 59 percent compared to 53.1 percent in June 2008. Of Ireland's 43 constituencies, the "yes" side won in 41, and the vote was very close in the two constituencies in which the "no" side came out on top; there were only about 1,000 more "no" than "yes" votes in those two constituencies out of approximately 60,000 total votes. The "yes" vote swept the country, with majorities in urban, rural, working-class and affluent constituencies all voting "yes." In some areas, almost 90 percent of the voters sided with the treaty.

WHY SUCH A LANDSLIDE?

[1](#)3. (C) Our interlocutors differ on the reasons for the result. Most of our contacts agree that the vote was about more than the treaty itself; they say it was, rightly or wrongly, about Ireland's place in Europe as symbolized by the treaty. Minister of State for European Affairs Dick Roche told us that the result reflected the Irish desire to play an active and positive role in Europe, and that the guarantees Ireland received from the EU after the first referendum about key areas of voter concern (ref D) cleared the way for the Irish to vote their pro-European sentiments. Ironically, Jens Bonde, former member of the European Parliament (MEP)

and one of the EU's most prominent eurosceptics, expressed a view similar to Roche's but from the opposite vantage point. He told us that the "yes" side won out because they had successfully sold the vote as a vote on European Union membership rather than a vote on the Lisbon Treaty.

14. (C) Our contacts said the economy played the single most important role in the vote. Grassroots "yes" campaigners from the governing party Fianna Fail told us voters were convinced that a "yes" vote would lead to more foreign investment in Ireland and stronger economic ties to Europe. Anti-Lisbon MEP Joe Higgins (Socialist Party) told us that people had been frightened into voting "yes" by the political and business elites' argument that a "no" vote would result in a further loss of investor confidence in Ireland, and thus further job losses. Jillian van Turnhout of "Women for Europe" said the vote reflected both hope for a better future in Europe and fear of the economic consequences of rejecting Lisbon.

15. (C) Irish Department of Foreign Affairs EU Director Dan Mulhall told us that after the economy, the Irish guarantees on retaining a Commissioner, neutrality, abortion and taxation were essential to gutting the "no" campaign. He also cited the big push in favor of the treaty by local business leaders -- including Ryanair's Michael O'Leary and the CEO's of Microsoft, Intel and Pfizer's Irish operations -- as critical to the "yes" victory.

16. (C) The lack of a well financed "no" campaign, with no single driving message also translated into the "yes" victory. After conceding defeat, Libertas leader/"no" campaigner Declan Ganley told us that Prime Minister Brian Cowen had masterfully played the campaign, mostly "by staying home." Referring to the neo-conservative conspiracy theory

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that surrounded the "no" victory in the previous referendum, Ganley quipped that "the CIA will be disappointed in this result," then joked that retired Admiral Wesley had told him last year that "if the CIA had been behind the 'no' vote in the previous referendum, it would have cost over USD 9 billion and the 'yes' side would have won." Ganley's American wife was less reconciled and declared that "it is the end of democracy in Europe."

COMMENT: THE VOTE'S CONSEQUENCES

17. (C) In Ireland, the resounding "yes" vote gives Brian Cowen's government, weakened by loss of support due to the economic crisis, its first political victory since coming to power and a badly needed boost in credibility. This may prove fleeting, but for the moment the government can approach upcoming make-or-break debates on its revised government program, financial reform and the budget (refs F-G) with some wind in its sails.

18. (C) For the EU, still awaiting final approval of Lisbon in the Czech Republic (ref B), the "yes" vote means a major, but not final, step toward Lisbon Treaty implementation. It will also signal the start of the race in Ireland for the Commissioner position (our contacts give former European Parliament President Pat Cox the leading edge). The Irish elites now expect a significant Commission portfolio as reward for delivering on Lisbon. Our Irish interlocutors also expect the scramble for the new EU positions (EU President, fortified EU High Representative) to begin in earnest. They also expect the vote to give a boost to ongoing EU enlargement talks with Croatia and Iceland.

19. (C) As for Irish voters, we doubt that they will notice much of a change in their immediate political or economic circumstances as a result of this vote. After two years, they will no longer have to consider existential questions

about the European Union and its institutions. The relief is palpable.

¶10. (C) Indeed, after all is said and done, this referendum might result in less, rather than more, long-term change. According to a highly placed interlocutor in the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, who asked not to be quoted by name, the "no" side might have ironically won one victory regardless of the October 2 vote -- after the Dutch and French "no" votes in 2005 on the EU constitution, and the year-and-a-half of effort and expense between June 2008 and October 2 in Ireland, this contact predicted there would be no attempt at further EU integration via treaty changes "in at least a generation." END COMMENT.
ROONEY